

To the BICY ORV Advisory Committee

Comments on the May 12, 2008 Agenda

First I thank all the Committee members for the giving of their time and expertise.

Tread Lightly and their upcoming survey of ORV users

Not having read it in advance or having seen the presentation I can only comment that surveys are tricky and the questions in surveys presented to us in the pass often are leading or misleading depending on the question and often have unintentional consequences.

An Example from one survey Do you wish to harvest a quality buck. Of course most of us answered yes not realizing that by answering yes it was interpreted that we do not wish to harvest smaller bucks or spikes.

Another question was how do you rate the importance of peace and solitude in an area? We say yes this is important. This could be interpreted that we do not want to hear the sounds of a buggy or an airboat in the landscape. This is not the case. We enjoy getting out to areas and shutting down but the sound of another on the way out to the area does not take away from our enjoyment.

Be careful what the ORV Advisory Committee agrees to and be sure of the wording of any survey. Ask also that space be provided to clarify answers so that there is no misinterpretation.

Surveys are often written by professionals who seek to get predetermined results.

Tread Lightly works closely with the agencies and promotes responsible recreation but the landscape and the traditionally cultural uses here in the Big Cypress is not the same as the rest of the Nation. Our culture is unique and we do not wish to be homogenized with the rest of the country.

Tread Lightly has a lot of experience and great resources. Their organization working on a survey may also turn out to be an excellent source to help educating the passive style of our ORV use to newcomers. We still need to be on top of the questions to be used in any survey. We should appreciate any help we can get in the Cypress but I must point out that in doing so we are again allowing another incremental step in the “taking of our cultures independent nature.”

Protocols dealing with the media.

While I do not support any infringement of freedom of speech I believe that unless authorized to do so a member of the committee should not speak for the whole committee unless authorized. Given that I also would not support the NPS censoring or withholding of information that members of

the committee have to say or any member being prohibited for saying what he or she thinks. I do advise be careful what is said to the media it often can be twisted or misinterpreted.

Education

Youth and their continued introduction into the Gladesman Culture along with safe operation of ORVs by our youth use is of the highest priority due to the fact that the NPS has nearly wiped out the existing culture and with the Youth ban of ORV operation has wiped out a generation of Gladesman. Teaching our children to operate a buggy or an airboat is a rite of passage for our youth into the culture.

There is also a need to educate the newly emerging groups about the traditional cultural community and that the type of ORV use is not that of hot-dogging mudding and tearing the place up. Our vehicles are used more of a utilitarian type of transportation to enjoy the journey going to places we have enjoyed visiting for generations. Sources such as Tread Lightly, Americans for Responsible Recreation Access, Blue Ribbon Coalition and 4-H clubs all provide good information.

Efficiency

Equally important maybe even more so would be especially if the NPS was serious about working efficiently would be if the NPS also practiced full disclosure of all processes and communication and documents between themselves and other agencies. My family and a couple of friends have worked for several years on a plan re-establishing access in airboat country and the NPS has refused to allow us to see copies of a preliminary draft plan the NPS sent to USFWS for review.

So to date the NPS has not shown that any of our recommendations and years of work were considered. This validates my concern that the NPS is disingenuous when it comes to actual consideration of our culture as a whole the public input process or the work of the Advisory Committee. Without the NPS operating with full disclosure of all the processes as we should do the ORV Advisory Committee will be left in the dark as far as your work on any project goes. How will you as a Committee be able to know how to make any effective changes or recommendations with the NPS withholding of the detailed information they hold internally or share with other agencies.

In order to be efficient the committee and we the people have to know the internal workings and access to all information in order to make better well informed decisions. We have been fortunate under Superintendent Karen Gustins administration in many ways she has been great, hands on and accessible and the staff has been extremely helpful on many occasions but

still copies of communications and plans we sought have been held hostage (zone 4). The NPS believes that we the public would be too confused to understand preliminary work and plans was one of their excuses.

As it is now the committee can be used to make it appear as though the public has input. But the reality is that we the public have often been used to give the appearance of our input in order to conform with law. But our input is put aside and the NPS goes ahead with whatever it has intended. Knowledge and information is power and the NPS refuses to operate in a manner that allows full freedom of information. How can this committee operate efficiently under these conditions?

Street legals

As a child and once I started driving we often used street legal vehicles on many of the roads and trails over a period of time this was eventually banned. During the dry season we drove cars as far as Coconuts to the south and on Monument Road Ben Wolfe even used his brand new t-bird convertible to get to his buddies Austins ranch where Ben kept a trailer to live in. I often drove my own vehicles from Monument Lake down the Monument road during the 70, s.

Street Legal vehicles were often used all over the Preserve and we enjoyed that. I have a history with using street legal vehicles but we have a problem with only 2000 quotas available. I am concerned emerging uses of street legals for other purposes such as mudding, ect could cause unintended social issues that are bad for the resource and could put the limited permits in the hands of people who do not have the Gladesman ethics or those of organizations such as Tread Lightly or Americans for Responsible Recreation Access ethics.

This is a complicated issue.

I believe that it should be delegated to a subcommittee so that proper time and talent can be use to come up with a plan. I would prefer a separate type of permit as to not take away from the few permits we do have and I would like to see street legal used in the Preserve in an appropriate manner.

When the plan was implemented street legals were banned from most of the Preserve. I thought Bear Island was supposed to allow street legal vehicles on the grades but I never followed up on it.

Turner River Unit Trail System

I say ask the NPS why Turner River is being worked on before zone 4 is finished. Why has the NPS not shared the preliminary documents sent to USFWS for review? I was assured by a ranking NPS official that the

progress of re-establishing some access in zone 4 would not be held up at the first ORV advisory Committee meeting.

A short time later Zone 4 plans are tabled and the information in regards to this project of which we put in an immeasurable amount of our own time, labor and expenses. I ask for copies of what the NPS has sent to USFWS for review and this information has been denied to us.

How does this relate to the Turner River project?

In order for the ORV Committee to work on Turner River or any project the ORV Committee must make sure all information being used and shared between the various agencies is shared with the committee and the public. Ask that the NPS not to withhold or hide information as they have done with zone 4 and the documents they shared with USFWS if this is not done the ORV Advisory Committee will find that their time and labor has been used for show not substance.

Another important Turner River issue that needs to be brought up is the fact that there are a number of historical roads within the Preserve that are now being considered trails. The mileage figures of these roads must not be included as part of the miles of trails allowed in the Preserve. be deducted from the miles of allow Monument Road is one such road and should not be included in the mileage figures

Lottery System

This is a complicated issue with so few permits and the possibility of street legals acquiring them the traditional longtime visitor may end up pushed aside . Another issue that is impacting us is the lack of other ORV riding areas I have noticed there are a lot of new groups of ORV users visiting the Preserve that historically never were here. While I support access for all, those of us who have been visiting the preserve and have held ORV permits off and on over the years before this lottery is put into place should be given first choice for life. I mention off and on because historically these were supposed to be free then fees became involved and some of us could not afford permits from time to time and some of us stopped purchasing permits when the youth ban was implemented and others due to the loss of our traditional historical access As long as the families or individual had purchased permits in the past whether continuously or intermittently as I have should be given first consideration due to our historical ties. A lottery system will result in creating another obstacle for those who gave up the Cypress until airboating is returned to South of the Loop (zone4&3) Ochopee and New River Prairies thus ensuring these families never come back.

A solution would be to sell more permits using the 2000 figure as a 2000 users per day quota. Even if we sold 3000 permits there would not be any

single day where we come close to the 2000 permitted users. An example is our family had 6 ORV permit last year yet we only were able to go on a total of 2 outings on the airboat and 3 on family ORV rides. Our families lack of ORV participation has been caused mostly by the limited access as well as curfews and the 60 day closure. From our camp there are two buggies which Dave has only one stickered and 4 airboats of which I only stickered one last year and our family had 5 stickered three wheelers and Dave again did not sticker any of his due to the limited ORV access we now have south of the Loop. I have not renewed any of mine this year also due to lack of access but would like to be able acquire permits if I choose without another obstacle or competing against so many new comers. I believe that we need a subcommittee to work on this in order to come up with a fair solution so that we can bring back some of the original families and friends without competing against the non-traditional user groups.

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Topics for Future meetings

1 Youth and ORV use

2 Secure a copy of the information sent to USFWS regarding access in Zone 4

3 implement the plan to re-established access in zone 4

4 Modify the airboat parking off of the airboat corridors in airboat country

5 do away with the ORV 10pm curfew and the 60 day closure

6. Airboat Access and the opening back up of Sig Walkers landing to access Ochoppe and new River Prairies